



## Clinton County non-profit farm strives to provide free meals

By **CARL GINGERICH**  
cgingerich@ftimes.com

A husband-and-wife duo launched their nonprofit farm to provide meals to those in need.

Evan and Autumn Overbay are credited with creating the Highland Heights not-for-profit farm and organization. The duo transitioned the farm into a non-profit organization in 2020 after seeing a need for fresh and accessible produce in Clinton County and the surrounding area.

Evan Overbay claimed that the main mission of the farm is to serve the impoverished community by improving food access and workforce development. Overbay stated that the food grown on the farm is donated back into the community through food pantries, and the duo is striving to provide half a million meals throughout the year to those in need. Highland Heights currently provides approximately 25,000 meals per year.

"Our overall vision of the farm is half a million meals given away a year and 100 people running through our program," said Overbay.

See **FARM**, page E7



Photo courtesy of Highland Heights  
**Evan Overbay, right, donates produce to chef Charity at Thy Kingdom Crumb: Indianapolis.**

## Clinton County flower farm shows promise for local business

By **CARL GINGERICH**  
cgingerich@ftimes.com

A Clinton County business owner began a farm two years ago with the intention to provide the community with innovative, unique and classic flowers grown near home.

J&H Farm was created in 2020 after Heather Wright, owner of Heather's Flowers in Clinton County, and her husband John Wright decided to grow their own flower stock to ensure the quality and quantity of the flowers available at the business. The farm hosts a large variety of flowers in just under 10 acres.

Wright says that she used local growers for many years before collaborating with her husband to begin the flower farm. Wright's husband was a farmer at the family farm prior to the establishment



Photos by Reggie Morgan  
**John Wright carries bucket of fresh-picked flowers through the field.**

of J&H Farm and was well-versed in growing techniques and methods, and Wright realized that growing her own flowers would allow for her to control what is grown,

how much is grown and what methods are utilized during the growing period.

Wright said that the farm

See **FLOWERS**, page E6

## How Berry Hill Farm grows vegetables



Photo by Rob Burgess / Plain Dealer

In early August, Myron Metzger leads a tour of Berry Hill Farm near North Manchester. The farm began in 2003 and, though they are no longer certified organic, they still follow many of the same practices.

## Wabash County property owner gives tours to show off their operation

By **ROB BURGESS**  
Wabash Plain Dealer Editor

In early August, Myron Metzger was leading a tour of Berry Hill Farm near North Manchester when he laid down his philosophy of doing business.

Metzger said he worked construction for a time after growing up watching his father do the same. Before they would start a job, they would price everything out. He said he did the same before thinking about planting a crop.

"I started doing just like as if I was going to build a house. I figured the materials. I figured the labor. Added a margin. This is what it's going to cost

you. You decide. 'Do you want me to build you a house or not?' Usually, they would say, 'Yeah,' said Metzger. "So I started applying that same thing here. How

long does it take me to make a bag of carrots? There's seed in there. There's overhead. For every hour I'm spending in that carrot bed I need to have \$30 to \$40 for that hour. It's got to be. If it ain't, I'm not paying my bills."

Metzger was standing in front of a bed full of long rows of carrots growing just underneath the soil. He pointed to the green tops. He said this crop had done particularly well in sales this year, despite the product being more costly than what consumers might be used to in the grocery store.

"That's why I'm \$4 for a pound of carrots. You buy them in town for less than \$2. But, it ain't the same carrot. People come and get them so they're telling me what's going on," said Metzger. "You can't let industrial ag set the parameters. You've got to set your own parameters."

The event was a part of a three-day "How We Grow Vegetables" Tour. Metzger led small groups around the property's open vegetable beds and their hoop and greenhouses.

See **BERRY HILL**, page E2

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The Wright Family poses with their centennial and sesquicentennial Hoosier Homestead Awards for owning and maintaining a farm within the same family for 183 years.

# Grant County farm recognized with Hoosier Homestead Sesquicentennial Award

By TAYLOR FRYMIER  
tfrymier@chronicle-tribune.com

Having been in operation since 1839, the Wright Farm in Jonesboro recently received Hoosier Homestead Centennial and Sesquicentennial awards.

“Our roots are in agriculture,” Donald Wright told the Marion Chronicle-Tribune on Wednesday afternoon. “It’s just important to be recognized of our long heritage of being involved in farming and owning farmland.”

Wright shared that his great-great-grandfather, Harrison Powell, bought the deed to the land from the General Land Office of the United States on Sept. 20, 1839. He then built the homestead and farm there which was originally used to raise cattle and hogs.

According to Wright, the foundation of the house that stood there for over a century was laid “the day fort Sumter was being fired upon at the onset of the Civil War (1862).”

Today, the 82.5 acre farm is maintained and cultivated by Wright’s brother and nephew, and has transitioned from livestock to corn and soybeans. Wright estimated that the pair pull in well over 200 bushels per acre of corn and 50 bushels per acre of soybeans each harvest.

Though the Wright family received recognition for 100 and 150 years owned and maintained by their family, the farm has actually been active for 183 years and will, therefore, likely receive the bicentennial award as long as the Wrights retain the homestead.

The Wright Farm was amongst over 100 awardees recently recognized at the Indiana State Fair for their commitment to Indiana agriculture.

“Agriculture continues to play a key role in our state’s history and economic success,” State Representative Tony Cook said at the ceremony. “For the same family to run a farm for more than a century is an incredible accomplishment, and I congratulate them on this achievement.”

Farms owned and maintained by the same family for 100 years or more can qualify for centennial (100 years), sesquicentennial (150 years) or bicentennial (200 years) Hoosier Homestead awards.

“When driving through our district, I pass by fields and farms and wonder how these

operations started,” State Senator Travis Holdman said during the ceremony. “With the Hoosier Homestead awards, families and the state get to take time to understand the history of each awarded farm and celebrate past and present family farmers who tirelessly worked to maintain a great level of success. I congratulate the Wright family for this impressive accomplishment.”

Each year, two awards ceremonies are held in the spring and summer commemorating the achievements of farm families across the state. Since its inception in 1976, more than 5,800 farms received the designation as Hoosier Homesteads.

For more information on the Hoosier Homestead Award Program, visit [in.gov/isda](http://in.gov/isda).

## BERRY HILL

From page E1

Metzger said they grow “wholesome food for wellness-minded people.”

“Berry Hill Farm began in 2003 with one acre of blueberries. Our focus at that point was to be engaged in a family-friendly activity. We soon realized that a great benefit was the interaction with our customers. While it is essential in any business to make enough profit to pay the bills and provide a living wage for those involved, we have found great fulfillment in bringing good food to people who appreciate it,” said Metzger. “In the past, we have been USDA Certified Organic, however through customer feedback and a careful evaluation of our biological approach to plant and soil health, we made the difficult decision to not certify organic, but instead apply that time and energy toward plant and soil care. Our guiding principles teach us to nurture soil biology in ways that sequester carbon, preserve soil nutrition and cultivate plants that will produce delicious fruits and veggies that are deeply nutritious. Through the use of greenhouses, winter covers and storage facilities we can keep fresh produce available 12 months of the year.”

Metzger said most of the beds on the property haven’t been tilled since 2014 or 2015.

“Underneath the plastic is the crop that’s done. Pull the tarp over it and in six weeks or a month, it’s laid down dead and the worms have already eaten a bunch of it. Put on compost and a layer of leaves,” said Metzger.

Metzger said they have found cover crops to be extremely important between growing seasons.

“The last thing you do is leave bare dirt. It’s just like never having your belly out in the sun and take your shirt off and go lay in it for all day long. It’ll just cook you. That’s what it does to bare dirt,” said Metzger.

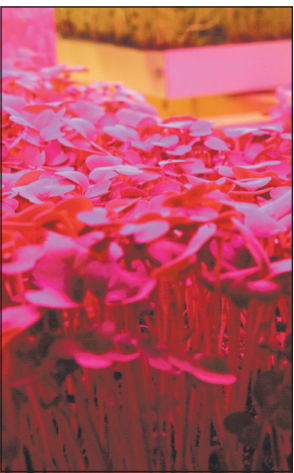


Photo by Rob Burgess / Plain Dealer  
The farm’s seedlings often start under these special indoor growing lamps.

Metzger said they don’t do any mechanical harvesting on the farm.

“We’ve always been small scale enough that it didn’t make sense,” said Metzger. “If everybody farmed like this, there would be no global warming. You’d take it out. That by itself. You could burn all the oil and fossil fuels you wanted to. But where a lot of it is coming from is these fields where they’re working them and kicking that carbon out. It just floods out. Also the inputs, the synthetics, they’re all carbon-based.”

Metzger said as far as animal intruders go, the deer haven’t bothered the lettuce, but they do enjoy the strawberries and sometimes the sweet potatoes.

Metzger said his melons hadn’t grown very well this year, but he wasn’t sure exactly why.

“If I was a melon farmer I’d be going and finding a job somewhere,” said Metzger.

But, Metzger said other, unexpected factors also affected the output of other plants.

“Kale is antagonistic to the nightshade family. If you have kale beside your tomatoes, they’ll grow kind of slow,” said Metzger. “We learn as we go. Lots of things to learn.”

Rob Burgess, Wabash Plain Dealer editor, may be reached by email at [rburgess@wabashplaindealer.com](mailto:rburgess@wabashplaindealer.com).



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Photos by Evan Mathews / emathews@perutribune.com  
**ABOVE:** Parents and schools take children to McClure's to show them where and how food gets produced. **RIGHT:** Jerry McClure shows off the corn maze, the newest addition to the McClure Orchard and Winery. **BELOW RIGHT:** Grapes grow on McClure's Miami County property.



# McClure's Orchard maximizes land productivity through diversity

By EVAN MATHEWS  
emathews@perutribune.com

Jerry McClure says his family's Miami County business – McClure Orchard and Winery – is thriving through diversification of its crops. Not only does the orchard grow apples, pears, berries and grapes, but has a winery and cafe, beehives, a corn maze and other crops. McClure bought the 80 acres 24 years ago and has immersed himself in the land. His children Megan and Jason, and Jason's wife Alison, have taken key roles in the farm. One of the keys to success is maximizing the utility of the land and production. The family does this by knowing the land and what it can properly yield. When asked about the diversity of crops on only 80 acres, McClure responded, "I'm glad you brought that up. These folks from Purdue (University) came down, and said, 'I can't believe what all you guys do here.'"

As he drove around the farm, he pointed out the different varieties of apples, knowing them by sight. The orchard's website boasts that it grows 150 varieties of ap-

ples and has 7,000 trees. The public can avail themselves of U-pick times at the orchard. McClure is particularly fond of his bees, who are crucial pollinators. The orchard usually keeps about 20 hives. When it comes time to pollinate crops, McClure sometimes has beekeepers from Logansport come in for extra help to continue production. "If we don't have bees, we'll lose probably 80 percent of our crop," he said. While pears are another fruit that grows on trees, McClure has not limited the farm to orchard crops. Red and black raspberries are in abundance, as is asparagus. Asparagus has about a six-to-eight week production life and is then allowed to go to seed. It becomes a bushy fern with small berries that look like baby tomatoes. Ferning out is essential to having a good crop in the following year. McClure pointed out his grapes as he drove through the farm in his small truck. He cultivates five different varieties of grapes. "Good grapes to grow in Indiana, to grow good Indi-



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# Farmers make strides to protect the environment, produce a product

## Aerial applications fly close to the ground

By ILENE HALUSKA  
ihaluska@H-Ponline.com

Farmers experience everything that others do. They encounter difficulties finding people to work for them, get accused of polluting the land, all while living and working in the same environments as everyone else.

Yet many say that they have made great strides in protecting the environment and growing a product.



ELLERS

“I grew up on the family farm and went on to Purdue to the school of ag and wanted to do something in agriculture, equipment, seed and ag retail,” said Erich Eller.

“Nine years ago, my wife and I started Agronomic and Precision, now Forefront Ag Solutions,” he said, adding that they consult with farmers, and the farmers take it from there.

“We work with farmers to find out how to best use agronomic products that’s safe for the environment but also have the highest economic impact for their operation,” he said, and they don’t waste the product to keep costs down, so it’s good for the checkbook as well.

“One of the biggest things we are involved in is going out in the spring and pulling soil samples and that helps identify nutrients, nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium. The fields vary across the acres of different levels and when we go back in and apply the right amount of nutrients for the crop that’s going to be grown.”

Eller says that the way prices are now it comes to several hundred dollars per acre for aerial applications.

Over the years, it has changed when one would see airplanes flying over the crops fields. What people used to see was a gray cloud, which was mostly water mixed with herbicides. Now the spray isn’t airborne, Eller explained, and it gets sprayed over the crops as much as possible.

“It varies between operators, but they can get pretty close,” Eller said.

Eller compared an acre of land with a football field including the end zones and infields. When it rains, one inch of rain adds up to 27,154 gallons of water in the field.

In aerial applications, they fly low because they’re putting 2 to 3 gallons of water mixed with 10 to 15 ounces of herbicide per acre.

“It’s pretty hard for that product to leach out of the fields,” Eller said. He wants to protect the environment and the products he produces, because it is his livelihood.

“One of the things is, why do we use airplanes? One, they can cover a lot of acres in a very short time. And two, these diseases come in on very foggy mornings and an airplane flying over it is so you’re not driving over crops,” he said.

Terry Kieffer, a Huntington farmer, who owns just under 5,000 acres says the biggest challenge to farming now are costs.

Years ago when they didn’t have GPS, a guy ran from one side of the field to the other with a flag and the plane had to look for it, he said of aerial applications.

Farmers live in the same environments as other people. They need employees like other employers do. Farmers need workers who have commercial driver’s licenses (CDLs) and there’s still a need in farming for manual labor, he explained.

Kieffer says that every day is different, too. He has two

part-time guys in the fall, and they work on combines and feters that go into the field. They also go in the shop maintaining equipment and changing belts to have the combines ready to harvest the crop.

He compared it to maintaining your car before going on a vacation or for the next season.

“We’ve got to do that when it’s time to harvest,” Kieffer said. When they start harvesting, depending on the weather, corn has to have so many days of high temperature and beans will need hours of sunlight. During harvest they need to clean trucks for cross contamination.

“The soybeans I plant are for seed stock and mine are that variety, that get cleaned and sorted before being planted,” he said.

“Aerial crop spraying is for corn,” Kieffer said. The ground truck sprayers aren’t tall enough to go over the corn stalks and the aerial applications have testing, training and equipment that is spot on.” He’s flown with one and says they fly quickly and need to watch what they do.

“We do aerial fungicide because we want to keep that plant healthy, to prevent diseases,” he said. Farmers can get docked at the elevators for unhealthy stalks and lose money. “It’s like spilling your cup full of milk and not being able to get it back.”

Kiefer says he’s the fourth generation in his family’s 100-year-old farm since his great grandpa came here from Virginia. He graduated in 1991 from Huntington North High School and after that took a Purdue Ag short course. He considers himself a full-time farmer. He said he has a daughter going to school in agronomy, which is the science of soil management, another in nursing, and a son in high school planning to come back, and for generations, he hopes to come.

## FLOWERS

From page E1

also allows for trial and error when experimenting with new varieties of flowers. Wright stated that some of the flowers she was receiving were not lasting as long as she would prefer, so she narrowed the flowers down to fit what she liked and needed, which are large flowers that last throughout multiple weeks. The main flower Wright highlighted were her sunflowers, which she narrowed down to three different varieties meant to fulfill her preferences.

“The sunflowers are such a big hit, and sunflowers are so plentiful as long as they’re a long-lasting variety,” said Wright. “You could go to a farmers market, and they might have sunflowers too, but there’s so many different varieties, and they’re all unique, but my sunflowers are meant to last.”

Wright claimed that the flower farm provides a means for her florist business to stand out amongst other flower shops across the region due to the care and science behind the soils and fertilizers used at the farm.

“Everything I have (my husband) grow, it’s like on steroids almost. We have special solutions and special growing methods,” said Wright. “My dad is a genius when it comes to growing and ways to put nutrients in the soil, so we have special concoctions that we use to make things bigger and better.”

One of Wright’s favorite flowers to grow is a peony, but she stated that the commonality of the peony and its difficult propagation may cause issues with the farm and sales, so her favorite flowers to grow are sunflowers and alliums.

“My alliums are huge, and those are one thing that I’ve never been able to get that big anywhere else, so those are one of my favorites,” said Wright. “We had varmint get into them this year, so we didn’t have as many, but I just love them.”



John Wright poses with the sunflower yield.

Wright emphasized the beauty and structure of her starburst alliums, which she claims are unavailable locally other than what her farm provides. Wright also highlighted a unique plant utilized in some of her arrangements known as gomphocarpus physocarpus, nicknamed “hairy balls,” “balloon plant” or “giant swan milkweed.” The plant is known to be a prominent attraction for pollinators, which benefits the surrounding flowers and the environment as a whole.

“(They’re) so conversation-starter-like. They’re in the milkweed family, so they attract a lot of bees with their blooms and attract a ton of butterflies. We put these in arrangements that are up here, and people will be like, ‘what are these? What are these?’ and they’ll want to touch them,” said Wright. “I’ve had these for several years, but this is the first year that (my husband) grew them.”

When the growing season is not as plentiful, Wright returns to purchasing flowers from the local growers that she used to always utilize. The growers receive flowers from South America, Holland and other areas. Many of the flowers and other plants actually change

with the seasons and become slightly different, such as the gomphocarpus, which dries and becomes a plum color. Wright stated that she does not solely use flowers from her farm for approximately two or three months during the year, typically January to March before the spring flowers begin to bloom.

“The seasons last for so long. There are so many different things that have different phases of growing. Once they start to dry, they look a bit different, and a lot of things will turn into pods, which is really cool,” said Wright. “I can use those even at Christmas. I can take a little bit of spray paint to grasses and turn them different colors, so it might be a lot at one time, but there’s so many different phases of those flowers, so I can use them for a long time.”

J&H Farm also sports a vegetable garden that is utilized for pickling and eating. Heather’s Flowers sells homemade pickles, spicy pickles, assorted vegetables, spicy relish and much more utilizing the vegetables grown in the garden.

For more information on Heather’s Flowers or J&H Farm, visit Heather’s Flowers at 64 E. Washington St. on the courthouse square in Frankfort.

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Photos courtesy of Highland Heights  
**ABOVE:** Evan Overbay harvests produce from the greenhouse.  
**RIGHT:** The greenhouse is the backbone of the growing operation.



**FARM**

From page E1

“It’s a work in progress, but that’s our overall vision we’re going for.”

Overbay claimed that the greenhouse on the property grows approximately 25,000 heads of lettuce each year alongside peppers, herbs and much more. Overbay estimated that the greenhouse sees the plants sprout from seed to harvest in just about four weeks. The greenhouse is equipped with intricate processes and machinery that move nutrient-rich water through the plants to regulate the process and increase efficiency. The farm also grows carrots, sweet potatoes, cucumbers, tomatoes and more in the outside garden.

Highland Heights is a United Way for Clinton County partner, and United Way sponsored the greenhouse this year to help support Highland Height’s vision. Overbay stressed that the greenhouse is the backbone of the growing operation and thanked United Way for its aid.

The duo began their gardening journey as farmers market gardeners who donated the leftovers from their farmers market visits to food pantries, but they realized that the food was not as fresh as it could be after being in the sun for eight hours at the market.

“We had been farming for about eight years and going to farmers markets. We were sort of your traditional market gardeners. With my wife being a social worker, she was working in town and one thing she noticed was that there wasn’t much fresh produce (at food pantries and other helpful organizations),” said Overbay. “That transition was sort of led by the need in the community.”

Highland Heights focuses on workforce development alongside the gardening aspect. Overbay stated that the workforce program planning is finished, and the organization is currently raising funds



to launch it. The program will mainly be available to those overcoming addictions, those recently released from jail and those struggling to find employment in an attempt to increase their chances of developing in the workforce.

“The workforce development came out of the food production. Right now, I’m by myself and my wife helps when she’s off work. Other than volunteers, that’s it, and it takes a lot of man hours to do a huge garden,” said Overbay. “We thought we’d help those that can’t get jobs because there’s only one or two jobs in town that will hire someone with a record, then we can call these places and say that they’ve been through our program and get their jobs, and we need the help.”

Alongside the workers and volunteers at Highland Heights, several animals act as farm hands by completing certain tasks, protecting the farm and providing essential goods and nutrients.

Overbay described Paul the goose as the loud spokesman of the farm, and he is paired with a protective turkey that stands guard to protect the farm. The ducks and other birds on the farm are tasked

with providing eggs for donation as well. On the farm, the animals have just as much character as the owners. The turkey in particular breaks through its bashful exterior to provide protection for the other animals, such as during an incident with a possum in the coop.

“It was just an awful commotion, so I start running, and out pops a possum--big possum--with a very angry turkey,” said Overbay. “He chased that possum all the way through the gate and off the farm. He was having none of that. He does his job.”

Highland Heights recently received a grant through the Duke Energy Foundation for about \$10,000 that will be used to build a barn. The farm also received a grant from the Centers for Disease Control and the Health Department that have and will pay for tractors and equipment. Overbay highlighted another grant through the government and the Health Department that will help implement a kitchen on the farm in partnership with Purdue. The kitchen will be utilized to teach cooking classes with fresh produce and host community dinners. The facility is expected to

hold approximately 10 cooks and 40 visitors. The project is expected to launch later this August.

The main project for Overbay is increasing the number of meals provided by the farm every year. According to Overbay, the farm will need to acquire about 50 acres to achieve 500,000 meals during the year. Currently, the farm owns slightly more than six acres of farming land, but Overbay plans to achieve his goal in five years.

“We’re ambitious. We’ve made big leaps in just the past two years alone as far as what we’re doing, all the grants and getting some of the infrastructure in place,” said Overbay. “We want to get the word out that we’re here and we’re here to help.”

To achieve his goal, Overbay claimed that the farm needs volunteers. Overbay stated that volunteers are welcome any day of the



Photos by Carl Gingerich  
**ABOVE:** Paul the goose acts as the spokesman of the animals.  
**LEFT:** Highland Heights hosts a variety of animals from ponies to dogs to poultry to a 4-H llama!

week in the morning or afternoon to help with weeding, planting, watering, running the greenhouse, feeding animals or conducting other farm-related activities. No experience is needed. Overbay also stated that positions are available for content creators, public relations, delivery drivers and more. Overbay claimed that this summer has accumulated over 760 volunteer hours for local community members, but the farm could utilize more than 21,000 hours of volunteer service.

Overbay recently launched an “Adopt a Row” fundraiser where community members and families can sponsor a row of produce at the farm for \$250. The row will help feed approximately 75 people and will be adorned with a sign thanking the donor for their aid.

Highland Heights currently donates produce to local food pantries and gardens

such as the Healthy Communities of Clinton County Coalition produce collection, the First Church of the Nazarene Church food pantry and Thy Kingdom Crumb: Indianapolis.

Highland Heights will be hosting a Harvest Fest on Saturday, Oct. 15 from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. at the Highland Heights Farm at 1215 E. Co. Rd. 650 South, Frankfort, Indiana 46041. The fest will feature a chili cook-off, an antique tractor show, live music, food tasting, corn hole and much more. Everyone in the community is welcome.

Overbay requested that the community help spread the word about Highland Heights and, if possible, donate to the cause at [highlandheightsfoundation.org](http://highlandheightsfoundation.org).

For more information, contact Highland Heights on Facebook, email at [evan@highlandheightsfarm.com](mailto:evan@highlandheightsfarm.com) or call at 765-237-2112.

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# Indiana farmers keep rural communities viable

PROVIDED BY  
INDIANA FARM BUREAU

Keeping rural communities thriving, even as more people migrate to suburban and urban centers, has always been a priority for Indiana Farm Bureau.

As the largest general farm organization in the state, INFB has a presence in all 92 counties, making it possible to assist farmers and others involved in agriculture where they live and work. Although, where Hoosiers live and work seems to have shifted in the past decade.

According to the 2020 Census data, 52 percent of Indiana counties – including most mid-sized and rural communities – lost population between 2010 and 2020. That is the largest number of Indiana counties to show a decline between censuses since the 1980s.

“The realization that we needed to refocus our efforts hit home when we saw the recent census data,” said Andy Tauer, executive director of public policy at INFB. “We know our members come from all areas of the state, but the majority come from rural areas. So, we’re trying to make sure that the resources and businesses located in those rural areas don’t suffer because of loss of population.”

In December of 2021, INFB hired Colette Childress, previously from the Indiana Office of Community and Rural Affairs (OCRA), to be a local government policy advisor. Since then, she’s been able to visit 32 counties in her role to help INFB members engage more in their communities and work with local governments to improve the quality of life in those areas.

“I’ve heard the saying before that ‘If you’ve seen one Indiana community, you’ve seen one Indiana communi-

ty.’ Every town, city and local government is different, so I’m working to engage those communities beyond just farming,” said Childress. “INFB members are more than just people on tractors. They’re leaders in their communities. By using INFB’s clout to help get things done at a local level, we’re setting the groundwork and foundation to really make a difference.”

In fact, that groundwork was set as a strategic initiative for the organization this past year to engage in infrastructure projects around the state. Whether that includes writing a letter of opposition to a proposed road project that would take away precious farmland, lobbying on a county’s behalf to get a drinking water project funded, or speaking in support of repairing a grain bin at a county board of zoning appeals, INFB has shown up to advocate for members in whatever way they needed.

Recently, members in Sullivan County have taken advantage of an opportunity for the city to apply for funding for a new fire station for their community. A local farmer there explained that if a fire broke out today, he could lose everything in a matter of minutes. With the grant they are seeking, it requires letters of support stating the public need for something like this, so Sullivan County Farm Bureau is preparing a letter to help support the needs of their community.

When a meat processing company wanted to purchase a vacant facility in Adams County, at first the Decatur City Council shot it down. INFB public policy team, field staff and Adams County Farm Bureau went to work to help inform the community about meat processing, engaged with the business to host tours of the facility and spoke in support

of the project at multiple public meetings. Ultimately, those actions shifted support and helped move it through the approval process. This will be the first industrial development started in the city in 25 years, providing a big boost to the local economy.

“Keeping rural Indiana viable requires local residents to get more involved in solving local problems,” added Childress. “Sometimes all it takes is an idea or a meeting with the right people to set progress in motion.”

“Colette helped us surface issues in our area that were helpful and catalyzed things that we would have not been able to accomplish on our own,” said Virgil Bremer, Rush County Farm Bureau president. “She’s great to bounce ideas off. Having experience at OCRA, she really understands the funding process and how to solve local issues with funding gaps.”

Since the pandemic, people have learned that they can work or attend school from anywhere. As a result, broadband access has become a huge pain point for rural communities because they’re losing people to areas that have better internet access.

“We are currently working on a rural broadband initiative in Henry County that would bring several different players to the table to create a broadband task force,” said Lis McDonnell, Henry County Farm Bureau president. “By providing trusted policy advice to our members and setting up meetings that we wouldn’t have been able to, INFB has fostered some key connections for us on the local, state and national levels that will really help improve our community in the long run.”

During the 2021 legislative session, INFB surveyed members around the state

about broadband. The surveyed showed 97 percent of respondents said that access to reliable high-speed internet was important or extremely important to their future. INFB helped pass four different bills that session that addressed bringing better broadband access to the unserved and underserved in Indiana.

“Keeping rural communities viable has always been an INFB priority, we’re just being more intentional and putting more resources toward that effort now,” said Randy Kron, president of INFB. “We want to make sure our farmers are able to pass down their farms to the next generation. But that generation won’t be here if we don’t put in the effort at the local level now.”

*About Indiana Farm Bureau: For more than 100 years, Indiana Farm Bureau (INFB) has promoted agriculture in Indiana through public education, member engagement, and by advocating for agricultural and rural needs. As the state’s largest general farm organization, INFB works diligently to ensure a farmer’s right to farm – protecting the livelihood, land, equipment, animals and crops of Hoosier farmers – because agriculture is vital to Indiana’s economy. Learn more at INFB.org*

# Indiana Grown welcomes new director

PROVIDED BY THE INDIANA  
STATE DEPARTMENT OF  
AGRICULTURE

Lt. Gov. Suzanne Crouch and Indiana State Department of Agriculture (ISDA) Director Bruce Kettler announced in September that Caroline Patrick will be the new director of the Indiana Grown program and will lead its nearly 2,000 members.

Patrick’s background focuses on culinary arts and local food procurement. She was most recently Director of Food Nutrition at Community Hospital East in Indianapolis where she started a bistro in the hospital focused on local foods. Her education includes a culinary arts degree from The Culinary Institute of America in Hyde Park, New York.

“As its new director, I am excited to see where Caroline will take the Indiana Grown program,” said Lt. Gov. Crouch, who is also Indiana’s Secretary of Agriculture and Rural Development. “Caroline will lead the charge in elevating the Indiana Grown program while continuing to provide value to its members and Hoosier consumers.”

In this role of Indiana Grown director, Patrick will help to ensure Indiana Grown members find and secure new opportunities and work to help consumers shop for local products. She will also meet with elected officials statewide to help them better understand the program and the need to support local food-based businesses and artisans. Ad-

ditionally, she will oversee the Indiana Grown team and work with them to set and realize a strategic vision and complete other operational needs.

“The Indiana Grown program is an exceptional way to promote shopping local and value-added production and processing here in the state of Indiana,” said ISDA Director Bruce Kettler. “I am confident under Caroline’s leadership the Indiana Grown program will continue to flourish and advance to the Next Level.”

In her previous role she was instrumental in COVID-19 care and precautions for the Community Health Network- East region. Patrick placed a major focus on securing local, fresh ingredients from nearby agri-businesses and farmers to give the Community Hospital East guests, caregivers and patients the best food and nutrition possible. She also oversaw the budget and team of nearly 80 staff members.

“I am thrilled to take on the role of director for Indiana Grown. This program is near and dear to my heart, and I have tried to source local and shop local for years in my previous roles,” said Patrick. “I am looking forward to connecting with members and encouraging entrepreneurship, awareness and expansion for local businesses in our great state.”

When consumers buy Indiana Grown member’s products they support local businesses and livelihoods. Learn more about Indiana Grown at indianagrown.org.



Lt. Gov. Suzanne Crouch and Indiana State Department of Agriculture (ISDA) Director Bruce Kettler announced Thursday that Caroline Patrick will be the new director of the Indiana Grown program and will lead its nearly 2,000 members.  
Photo provided





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One side view of a corn plant in the RGB imaging booth of the Ag Alumni Seed Phenotyping Facility. From left to right: original RGB image; corn plant segmented from background; fluorescence view; and measurement.

## Purdue phenotyping facilities offer powerful tools with a delicate touch

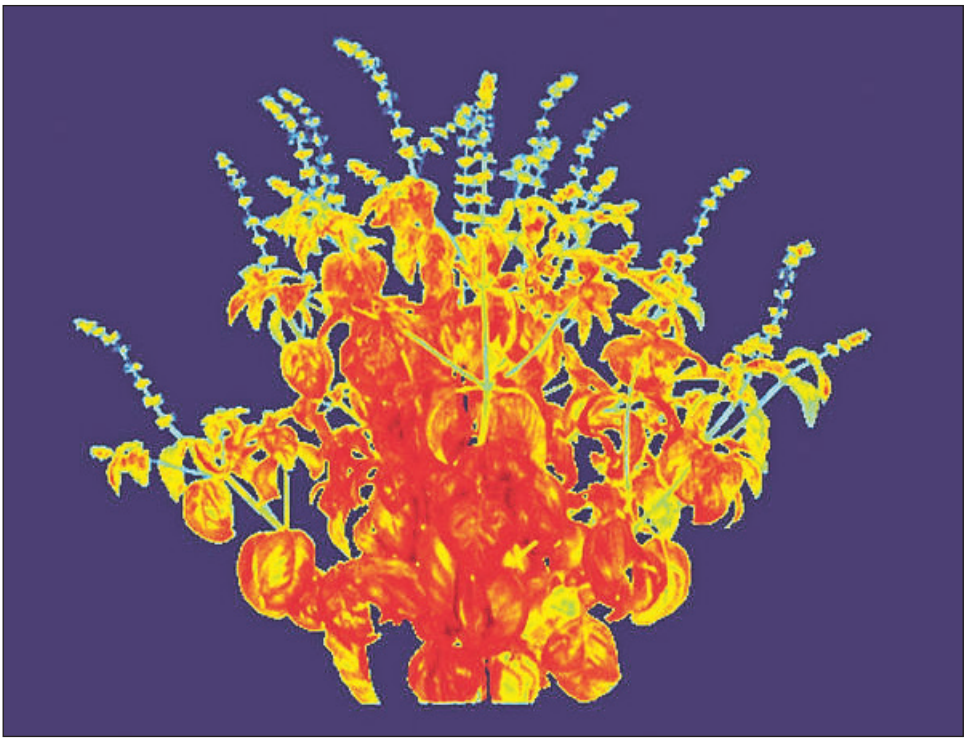
PROVIDED BY  
PURDUE UNIVERSITY

Phenotyping at Purdue University is pushing the limits of technology, offering researchers powerful insights into plants without disturbing a single leaf.

Purdue's Ag Alumni Seed Phenotyping Facility (AAPF) is a high-throughput, controlled-environment facility equipped with multiple imaging systems and a professional team to help with experiments and data analysis.

A phenotype, an observable characteristic of an organism, is like the flip side of the record from genotype, an organism's genetic code. In addition to characteristics like height or disease resistance that may depend on a plant's genes, its phenotype might also include a plant's physical responses to changes in environmental factors such as drought or flood, rich or poor soil and pests. For plant sciences, an understanding of both the genotype and phenotype is a complete album with all the hit songs of that plant.

"We aim to close the gap between the rich genomic data that has been developed in the last few decades and an understanding of the traits those genes lead to in a plant," said Yang Yang, director of digital phenomics at Purdue who leads the AAPF. "Doing so will improve crop resilience and food security and enhance the nutritional quality of what we grow. However, through digital phenomics we can do more than that. We can create tools to improve farm management and quickly identify threats to crops, food safety



A hyperspectral image showing vegetative indices of a healthy basil plant. The reddish orange indicates healthy vegetation and the yellow indicates unhealthy vegetation.

or human health."

The facility, a key component in Purdue's Next Moves in Plant Sciences, houses two growth chambers and multiple imaging systems including a color imaging system (red, green, blue, or RGB), a hyperspectral imaging system, and an X-Ray CT root scanner. All imaging systems in the facility are fully automated and integrated into a single operation management system.

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In a matter of seconds, the system scans a plant and extracts an assortment of measurements from height, stem width, and number of leaves, to custom measurements for the research project, for example leaf curvature, number of particles per head of wheat, or the angle between each leaf and stem.

"This system uses digital technology to extract and record measurements in a matter of seconds that would take much, much more time if done by hand," said Yang, who has expertise in both engineering and plant physiology. "These measurements are the foundation of most experiments in the facility, and from there the plants move on to measurements

beyond human perception."

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When thinking of plants, color may be the first thing to come to mind – lush green leaves or flowers of any hue – but there are colors beyond what our eyes can see that reveal a plant's health or the presence of a threat.

"Hyperspectral imaging goes beyond the red, green and blue color bands humans can see," said Yang. "It is highly sensitive to changes in plants and can reveal signatures of plant stress from

See PHENOTYPING, page F9

## Vermillion, Huntington county farmers win Farm Bureau's top awards

PROVIDED BY  
INDIANA FARM BUREAU

Carter and Abby Morgan of Vermillion County and Johan and Déjanne de Groot of Huntington County are the winners of two of Indiana Farm Bureau's top awards for Young Farmers & Ag Professionals – the Excellence in Agriculture Award and the Achievement Award.

Two panels of judges evaluated this year's participants. Excellence in Agriculture candidates were judged on their involvement in agriculture, leadership ability, as well as their involvement and participation in Farm Bureau and other organizations. The Achievement Award candidates were judged on their leadership abilities and what they have achieved with their farms.

Carter and Abby Morgan, Vermillion County, won the Excellence in Agriculture Award, which honors

Farm Bureau members who do not derive the majority of their income from an owned, production agriculture operation, but who actively contribute and grow their involvement in Farm Bureau and agriculture. The Morgans will receive an \$11,000 cash prize, courtesy of Farm Credit Mid-America and Indiana Farm Bureau Insurance, and an all-expenses paid trip to San Juan, Puerto Rico to compete at the 2023 American Farm Bureau convention in January.

Johan and Déjanne de Groot, Huntington County, won the Achievement Award, which recognizes INFB members who earn the majority of their income from production agriculture and measures applicants on their leadership involvement and farm management techniques. The de Groots will receive an \$11,000 cash prize, courtesy of Bane

See AWARDS, page F8

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# Political divide affects American views on food inflation

PROVIDED BY  
PURDUE UNIVERSITY

Personal politics influences consumer perceptions of food inflation, with liberals estimating the increases at about three to four percentage points below conservatives, according to the monthly Consumer Food Insights Report.

The survey-based report out of Purdue University’s Center for Food Demand Analysis and Sustainability assesses food spending, consumer satisfaction and values, support of agricultural and food policies and trust in information sources.

“The divergent perceptions of food inflation between liberals and conservatives is interesting to observe,” said Jayson Lusk, the head and Distinguished Professor of Agricultural Economics at Purdue, who leads the center. “Not only are liberals severely underestimating the increase in food prices from last year, but conservatives’ expectations for inflation are also likely overstating its rate for the coming year—at least compared to U.S. Department of Agriculture predictions.”

Purdue experts conducted and evaluated the survey, which included 1,200 consumers across the U.S.

Additional key results include:

- Consumer food spending and inflation expectations decreased slightly.

- Food insecurity levels have not increased despite record high food prices.

- Liberals prioritize the social and environmental sustainability of their food more than others.

- “Local food” is politically less polarizing relative to concepts like “plant-based” or “climate change.”

■ Both liberals and conservatives support funding for agricultural conservation and research programs.

Notably, both diet well-being and food happiness scales show little difference between liberals, moderates and conservatives. The political agreement over the quality of food that Americans consume highlights the success of the U.S. food system, which also shows in scores on the Sustainable Food Purchasing (SFP) Index.

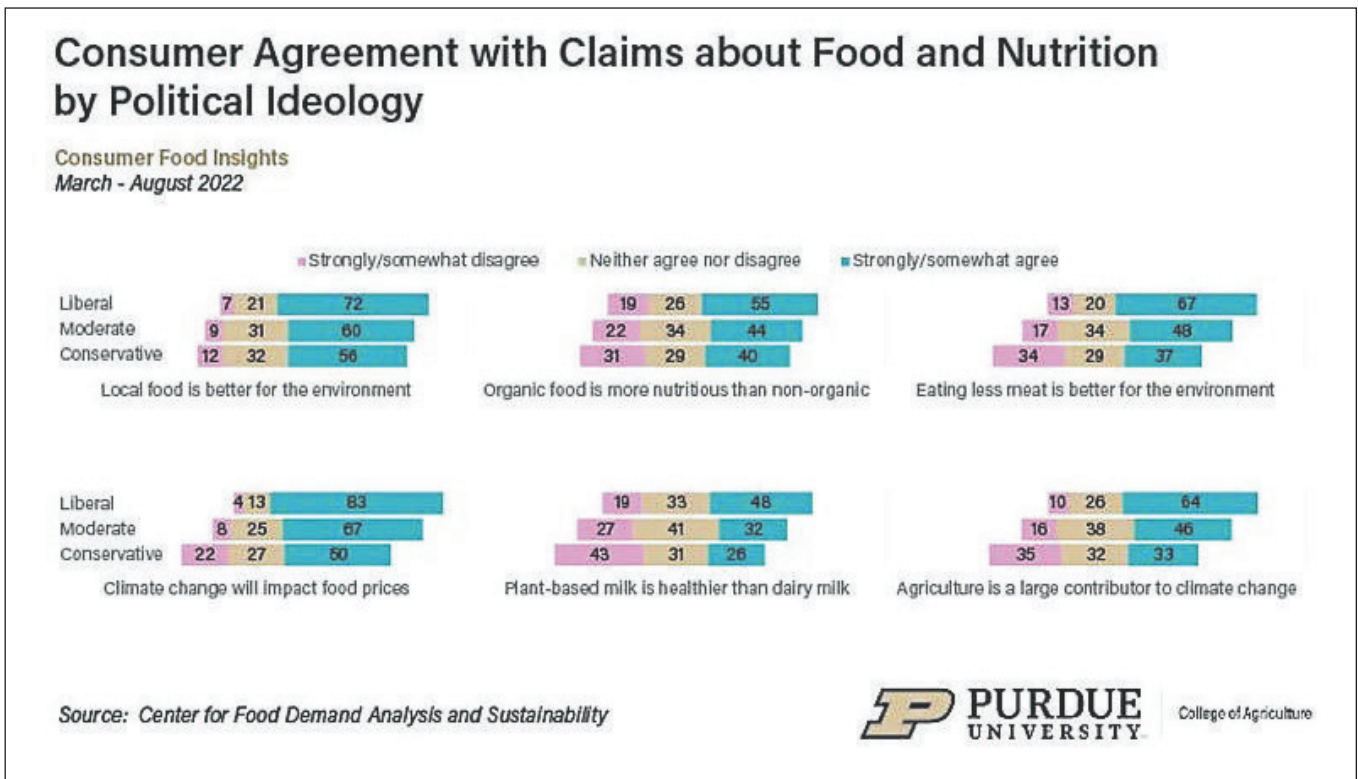
“In a country as diverse as the U.S., we have been able to satisfy a great number of diets, tastes and needs,” Lusk said.

The SFP, a self-reported measure of food purchasing, assesses how well consumer shopping habits mesh with healthy diets from sustainable food systems. This month’s SFP index of 69 on a scale of 100 is unchanged from the July report. The ongoing stability of the SFP index shows that consumer willingness to make sustainable food choices changes little from month to month.

Graph on Consumer Agreement with Claims about Food and Nutrition by Political Ideology

But even when majorities of each group agree on some aspect of food policy, such as increasing conservation funding for farmers, liberals lead conservatives by at least 15 to 20 points in support for more government intervention, the report said.

There also remains a huge disagreement over the statement that “eating less meat is better for the environment.” This comes despite the different environmental impacts of plants versus animals now well-established by scientific research, said Sam Polzin, a food and agricultural survey scientist for the



Consumer Agreement by Political Ideology – Purdue Center for Food Demand Analysis and Sustainability

center and co-author of the report.

“It emphasizes the point that simply messaging a vegetarian or reduced meat diet is not going to move the needle on food sustainability, especially given the low adoption of plant-based diets across the political spectrum,” Polzin said.

consumer-budget10.jpgIn other survey findings, food ranked as the greatest budgetary stress for consumers based on a question asking respondents to pick their three expenses of greatest and least concern.

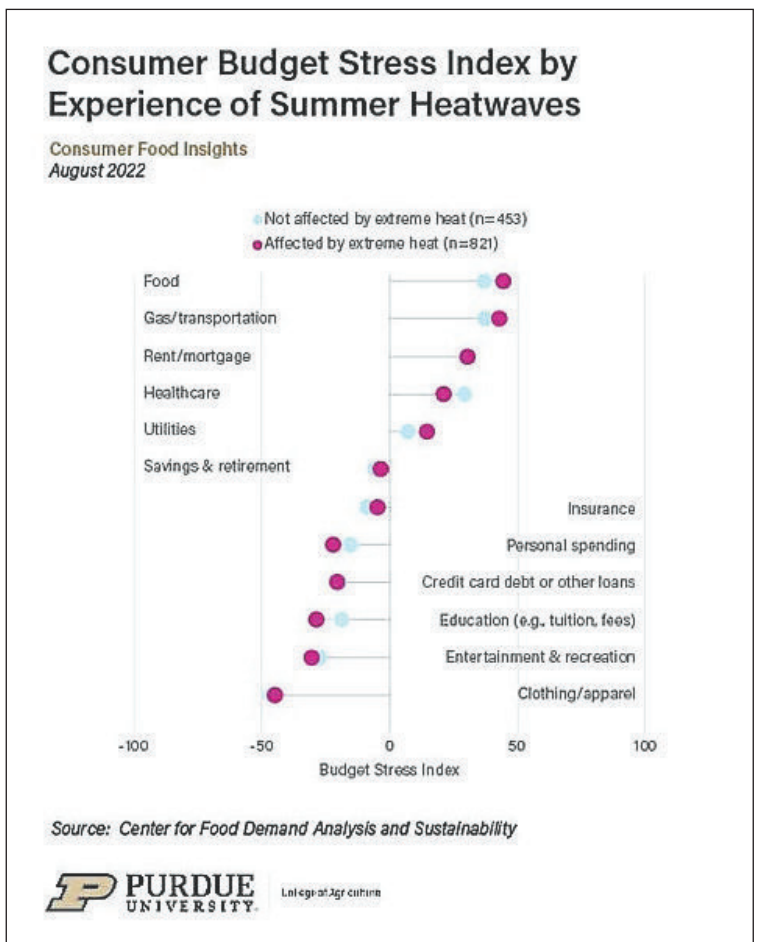
“We don’t have previous data to show whether this is a recent phenomenon given the high price environment,” Polzin said. “But, at a time when consumers continue to make changes to their shopping to adjust to prices, this highlights that food is one of the first essentials that gets squeezed under budget stress.”

The report also showed that the summer heatwave

increased utility bills by 23 percent in many households, put a drag on consumer budgets, and led Americans to be less active outside their homes. Between one fourth and one-half of the consumers reported spending less time exercising, going shopping, eating out, and drinking alcohol. The results suggest that future heat waves will put greater stress on budgets and reduce purchasing across several areas.

The Center for Food Demand Analysis and Sustainability is part of Purdue’s Next Moves in agriculture and food systems and uses innovative data analysis shared through user-friendly platforms to improve the food system. In addition to the Consumer Food Insights Report, the center offers a portfolio of online dashboards. For more information, visit: <https://ag.purdue.edu/next-moves/areas-of-focus/food-systems/>.

Written by Steve Koppes.



Consumer Budget Stress Index – Purdue Center for Food Demand Analysis and Sustainability

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# Assessing global biodiversity with ears to the ground, NASA eyes in the sky

Purdue research team using microphones, drones, satellites to understand changes in animal and plant diversity

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WEST LAFAYETTE, Ind. — Purdue University professor Bryan Pijanowski’s research team will be working in some wild and remote places around the globe in the coming year.

Pijanowski’s sound-source surveyors will be equipped with microphones, headphones and parabolic reflectors to efficiently collect sound waves from the natural world. Their tools also include low-flying drones and sensors mounted on orbiting satellites and the International Space Station.

The Purdue team is utilizing these resources to develop a global model of animal and plant diversity and how it changes. They will also access Purdue’s two crown jewels of global biodiversity databases. One is the Global Forest Biodiversity Initiative, a database that holds tree species inventories from more than a million plots of land. The other database, at the Center for Global Soundscapes, contains more than 4 million audio recordings from most ecosystems on Earth.

“We’re using acoustic remote sensing to develop the animal biodiversity model,” said Pijanowski, center director and professor in the College of Agriculture’s Department of Forestry and Natural Resources. He has, for example, maintained an acoustic sensor in the wetlands of the Purdue Wildlife Area since 2007. And from the Southeast Asian island of



NASA Tippecanoe Soundscapes study field team in the lab’s classic “Are you listening?” pose. Shown (from left) are Gabby Krochmal, Francisco Rivas Fuenzalida, Aubrey Franks, Ruth Bowers-Sword, Samantha Lima, Bryan Pijanowski, Jinha Jung, David Savage and Jingjing Liang.

Borneo alone, he has more than 25,00 recordings that include sounds from 3,000 animal species.

NASA Tippecanoe Soundscapes study field team in the lab’s classic “Are you listening?” pose. Shown (from left) are Gabby Krochmal, Francisco Rivas Fuenzalida, Aubrey Franks, Ruth Bowers-Sword, Samantha Lima, Bryan Pijanowski, Jinha Jung, David Savage and Jingjing Liang. (Purdue University photo/Tom Campbell) Download image

The highly transdisciplinary work requires expertise in ecology, social sciences, engineering, statistics and the humanities. Project co-leads include Purdue’s Kristen Bellisario, clinical assistant professor in the John Martinson Honors College; Jinha Jung, assistant professor in the Lyles School of Civil Engineering; and Jingjing Liang, associate professor of forestry and natural resources.

The NASA project specifically focuses on developing

plant-animal diversity models for four different types of forested ecosystems. The work starts in the deciduous forests of nearby Tippecanoe County in Indiana. Pijanowski’s team uses the area as its “sandbox,” where they go for research training and protocol development. The other three sites are located in Tanzania’s Miombo Woodlands, Mongolia’s savanna and forest-steppe ecosystems, and the mangroves of the Sundarbans UNESCO World Heritage Site in Bangladesh.

“The Miombo Woodlands is one of the largest forest ecosystems in the world,” Pijanowski said. “The Sundarbans is the location of one of the most pristine mangrove sites in the world. Mangroves and estuaries are under great threat from climate change due to rising sea levels. And Mongolia represents a mixture of coniferous forests and grasslands, which are also threatened from climate change.”

The project will extend

the biodiversity models of all four ecosystems to other long-term studies in Borneo, Southeast Asia; Costa Rica, the Caribbean; Finland, northern Europe; and Patagonia, South America.

The Purdue team’s multiple data-collection platforms include three experimental sensors onboard the International Space Station.

“These are experimental sensors to map and create plant habitat models that we then calibrate with all the measurements we’re making on the ground and with unmanned aerial vehicles,” Pijanowski said.

The space station’s Global Ecosystem Dynamics Investigation (GEDI) uses light detection and ranging (LiDAR). The DLS (German Aerospace Center) Earth-Sensing Imaging Spectrometer (DESI) is a hyperspectral sensor that detects species composition and diversity spanning electromagnetic frequencies from visible light to infrared. And ECOSTRESS, a

thermal sensor, detects the drought stress condition of plants.

Two satellite systems complement the space station sensors. These are the Moderate-Resolution Imaging Spectroradiometer (MODIS) and Landsat, which detect fires in Tanzania that affect the habitat of chimpanzees, bush babies, monkeys and baboons.

With these three space station sensors, the team gleans data on a habitat’s structural complexity, species diversity and stress, which mesh with the global tree dataset.

Drones flying 80 meters above the ground provide high-resolution data (1-centimeter pixels) that allow the researchers to calibrate with the space station data. The team also conducts plant surveys at each location.

Jinha Jung and his geospatial data science group handle calibrations and linkages among ground-based, airborne and spaceborne data.

“We need to be able to relate the images we get to spe-

cific locations that Bryan is visiting and recording sound to quantify biodiversity,” Jung said. “We can generate very high-resolution 3D models of those locations.”

One task of Jung’s group is to fill the gaps in the space station’s LiDAR coverage. Orbiting at an average altitude of about 250 miles and moving at 17,500 miles per hour, the space station bounces the GEDI laser beam off the Earth’s surface at intervals of about 70 meters.

Jung’s group also will create 3D models of all the NASA biodiversity field sites and make the 3D models available on the project website. The models will allow users to point and click on a site, zoom in and rotate the view in three dimensions.

“We’re going to embed recordings so visitors can visualize the site in 3D, but they can also hear the sound, almost feel like they’re actually there,” Jung said.

The NASA biodiversity project is part of Pijanowski’s mission to record the Earth. His chorus4nature.org website connects to his entire database of global biomes, the various natural habitats where plants and animals make their home.

“People can look at all of our sites in the maps of locations where we have studies,” he said. “We describe all the biomes, all the different studies, the threats to the biomes. We have a photo catalog of all the sites and videos talking about the sites and what we’re doing there as scientists in action. Ultimately, we are trying to use the very best technology to solve some of society’s grand challenges of species loss and climate change. Being supported by NASA makes this especially part of being a Boilermaker; Purdue is the cradle of astronauts. Perhaps, with NASA’s help, we will be the cradle of solving global biodiversity challenges.”

Written by Steve Koppes.



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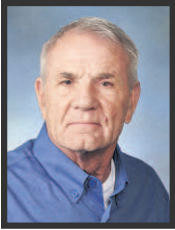
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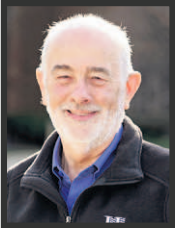
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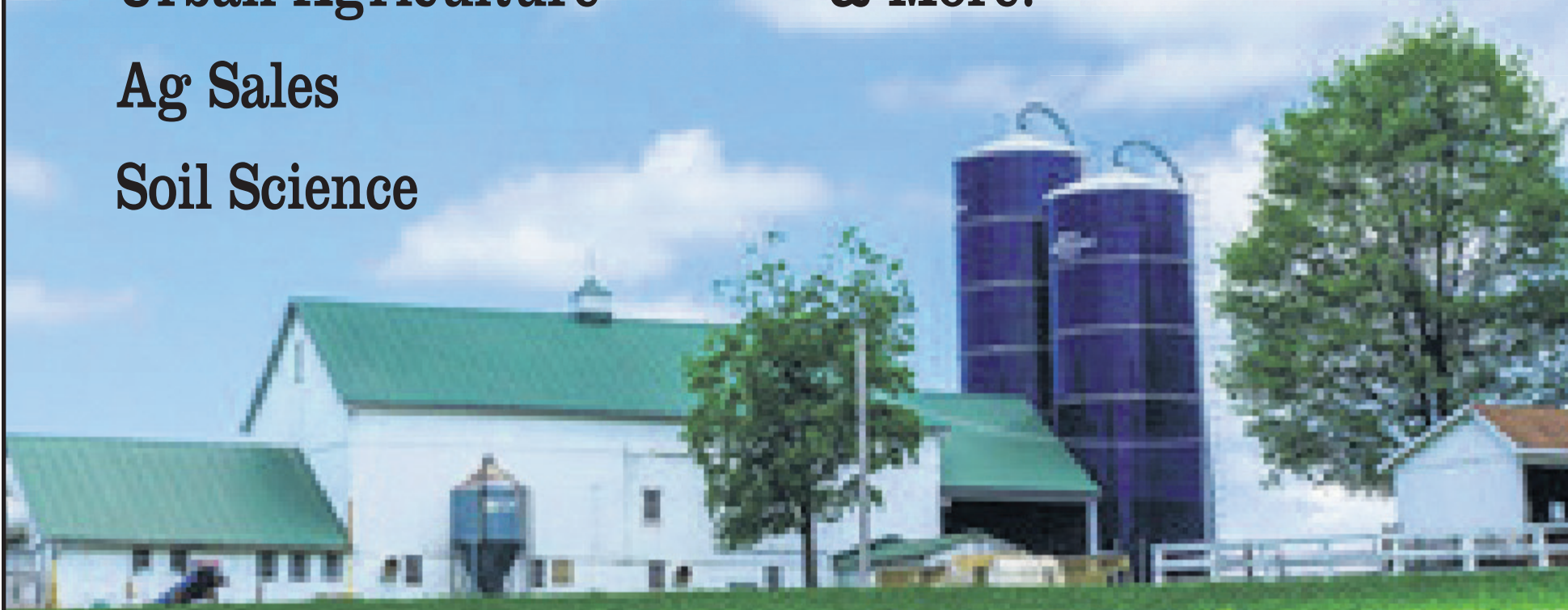
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**ABOVE:** Farmers from across the region bring fresh produce to sell. **RIGHT:** Florists find success at the downtown farmers' market. **BELOW:** Entertainment is widespread, such as with the Frankfort High School orchestra.



# Community reinvents downtown farmers' market

By **CARL GINGERICH**  
cgingerich@ftimes.com

The Frankfort community recently reimplemented the downtown farmers' market featuring produce, trinkets, crafts and more from across the region.

Community member MaryLynn Peter approached the city leaders with the idea to reinvent the farmers' market in Frankfort with local farmers from Clinton County and surrounding counties, and the city expressed its immediate approval of the project. Upon approval, the first farmers' market was set for Aug. 13 at Veterans' Park in Frankfort. Given the community involvement, the farmers' market will continue on every Saturday from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. at Veterans' Park throughout the season.

The farmers' market is located in Frankfort and features farmers from Flora, Burlington, Lafayette, Lebanon, Kokomo and more. Peter expressed hope that more vendors from across the region will attend in the future.

Peter claimed that numerous vendors were experiencing a high volume of sales, and many vendors sold out of their items during the day. Peter commented that the farmers market was not operational in Frankfort for almost five years, but after seeing a man selling tomatoes in the downtown area, she reimagined the idea at Veterans' Park.

"We used to have farmers markets downtown at first ... at Ivy Tech where no one could get to it. So, that kind of went out of the way," said Peter. "(I thought), Veterans' Park sits there empty on Saturdays. It's just sitting there ... why can't we use that? It'd be a perfect place. There's plenty of parking, and it's right downtown where people can see it."

Frankfort Mayor Judy Sheets agreed with Peter re-



Photos courtesy of MaryLynn Peter

Local merchants gather to sell produce and handmade goods.

garding the new location and the benefit to the community. Sheets commented that the previous location was not ideal but utilizing Veterans' Park will bring yet another downtown event for the community inside the parks.

"I think it's a great idea. As you said, we did that in prior years, so I think that move to Ivy Tech wasn't a very successful location," said Sheets. "I think Veterans' Park would be a really good location."

The farmers' market will allow for community members to sell and purchase flowers, vegetables, home-baked goods, honey, eggs and much more. For items such as eggs and frozen chicken, Peter cited that the sellers will be required to obtain a permit from the Clinton County Health Department, which costs \$60 for the entire season. Uncut produce and similar items such as watermelon, tomatoes, cucumbers and more will not require the seller to obtain a permit, but the merchant will be required to complete a form for registration.

Before the first farmers market began, Peter commented that the community has supported the idea on social media and numerous potential sellers had already begun obtaining permits and preparing for the upcoming markets.

"I've mentioned it on Facebook, and I've got tons of

support. People can't wait. It may start out slow—maybe not a whole lot of people selling their things—but once word gets out, it will pick up," said Peter. "I've got a couple people really excited about coming out and selling their stuff. One of them has already gone and got her permit, and she's all excited and baking away right now, I'm sure."

Peter expressed that she intends to limit the farmers market to the sale of fruits, vegetables, baked goods, farm-raised products and more but will not allow stands of trinkets, jewelry and other goods typically associated with a flea market.

"I don't want to treat it as a flea market. I want a true farmers market," said Peter. "I want it to be a true farmers market where people can go to get their fruits and their vegetables and baked goods."

The market has showcased numerous musical acts, such as the Frankfort High School orchestra and local bands. The market typically encourages local businesses to provide refreshments and food for visitors as well.

For more information, visit the farmers' market at Veterans' Park at 101 E. 1st St., Frankfort, Indiana 46041, or contact MaryLynn Peter on Facebook or visit the Frankfort Farmers Market (New and Improved!) Facebook group.

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George Naylor looks over organic apples grown on his farm, Tuesday, Sept. 13, near Churdan, Iowa. Naylor, along with his wife Patti, began the transition to organic crops in 2014. The demand for organics has increased so fast that the U.S. Department of Agriculture last month committed up to \$300 million to help farmers switch from conventional crops.

# More consumers buying organic, but U.S. farmers still wary

By **SCOTT MCFETRIDGE**  
Associated Press

CHURDAN, Iowa – In the 1970s when George Naylor said he wanted to grow organic crops, the idea didn’t go over well.

Back then organic crops were an oddity, destined for health food stores or maybe a few farmers markets.

“I told my dad I wanted to be an organic farmer and he goes, ‘Ha, ha, ha,’” Naylor said, noting it wasn’t until 2014 that he could embrace his dream and begin transitioning from standard to organic crops.

But over the decades, something unexpected happened – demand for organics started increasing so fast that it began outstripping the supply produced in the U.S.

Now a new challenge has emerged: It’s not getting consumers to pay the higher prices, it’s convincing enough farmers to get past their organic reluctance and start taking advantage of the revenue pouring in.

Instead of growing to meet the demand, the number of farmers converting to organic is actually dropping. Last month, the U.S. Department of Agriculture committed up to \$300 million to recruit and help more farmers make the switch.

“It feels good,” said Chris Schreiner, executive director of the organic-certifying organization Oregon Tilth, referring to the government help. “It’s a milestone in the arc of this work.”

Schreiner, who has worked at the Oregon-based organization since 1998, said expanding technical training is important given the vast differences in farming land conventionally and organically. Schreiner noted that one farmer told him that converting a conventional farmer was like asking



George Naylor holds an organic apple grown on his farm.

“a foot doctor to become a heart surgeon.”

The key difference is the use of synthetic fertilizers and pesticides as well as genetically modified seeds. Most conventional farms rely on those practices but they are banned at organic farms. Instead, organic farmers must control weeds and pests with techniques such as rotating different crops and planting cover crops that squeeze out weeds and add nutrients to the soil.

Crops can only be deemed organic if they are grown on land that hasn’t been treated with synthetic substances for three years. During that period, farmers can grow crops, but they won’t get the extra premium that accompanies organic crops.

According to the USDA, the number of conventional farms newly transitioning to organic production dropped by about 70 percent from 2008 to 2019. Organic comprises about 6 percent of overall food sales, but only 1 percent of the country’s farmland is in organic production, with foreign producers making up the gap.

In the U.S., “There are so many barriers to farmers making that leap to organic,” said Megan DeBates, vice president of government affairs for the Organic Trade Association.

While farmers seem hesitant, U.S. consumers aren’t. Annual sales of organic products have roughly doubled in the past decade and now top \$63 billion, according to the Organic Trade Association. Sales are projected to climb up to 5.5 percent

this year.

That growth is clear to anyone pushing a cart in an average supermarket, past bins of organic apples and bananas, through dairy and egg sections and along shelves brimming with organic beef and chicken.

The new USDA effort would include \$100 million toward helping farmers learn new techniques for growing organic crops; \$75 million for farmers who meet new conservation practice standards; \$25 million to expand crop insurance options and reduce costs; and \$100 million to aid organic supply

chains and develop markets for organics.

Nick Andrews, an Oregon State University extension agent who works with organic farmers, called the USDA effort a “game changer.” It should be especially attractive to farmers with small parcels of land because the added value of organic crops makes it possible to make significant money off even 25 to 100 acre (10 to 40 hectare) farms – much smaller than the commercial operations that provide most of the country’s produce.

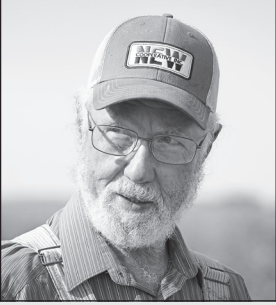
“I’ve seen organic farmers keep families in business who otherwise would go out of business,” Andrews said.

Noah Wendt, who in the past few years has transitioned 1,500 acres (607 hectares) of land in central Iowa to organic, noted the shift has been “rocky” at times for him and his farm-



George Naylor and his wife Patti walk through a cover crop of clover on their farm,


HE SAID



“I told my dad I wanted to be an organic farmer and he goes, ‘Ha, ha, ha.’”

**GEORGE NAYLOR**

SHE SAID



“It really helps to believe in what you’re doing.”

**PATTI NAYLOR**



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# Indiana farm fatality summary shows positive trends, stresses worker safety

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WEST LAFAYETTE — Purdue University’s Agricultural Safety and Health Program released the annual Indiana Farm Fatality Summary with Historical Overview, coinciding with National Farm Safety and Health Week. The annual observance has taken place during the third week of September since 1944.

The program reported 20 work-related on-farm deaths in the state of Indiana in 2021. Data shows that tractors are the most common agent in farm-related fatalities, representing as many as 52 percent of documented cases in the past 10 years, with six reported cases in 2021. Other causes included grain entrapment, equipment

runovers and entanglements, and asphyxiation by fumes in confined spaces.

This shows a decrease from the 25 cases identified in 2020 and marks the fewest cases reported in the past eight years. Farm fatalities for the past 50 years continue to trend lower, likely reflecting safer machinery and work practices while also corresponding with a decline in the number of farmers.

Despite this positive trend, program members urge agricultural workers to remain diligent and follow safety protocols. No Indiana agency requires official documentation of farm-related injuries or fatalities, but prior Purdue research has indicated that each year approximately 1 in 9 Indiana farms has a farmwork-related injury incident that requires

medical attention.

Documented incidents involving those age 60 or older account for nearly half of all cases in the past five years, including 40 percent in 2021.

“Historically, farmers over the age of 60, including many who work only part-time, have accounted for a disproportionate number of farm-related injuries. Recent spikes in frequencies of fatalities over the past 10 years make this population of older farmers a special concern,” the report states.

Males account for most fatalities, with only one female fatality recorded in 2021. One victim was a child, but historical data shows an overall decline in the frequency of farm-related fatalities involving children and youth.

EdSheldon,reportco-author

and Purdue agricultural safety specialist, said, “It is encouraging that the average number of annual farm-related fatalities continues to decline. That said, in 2021, at least 20 Indiana families and communities felt the devastating impact of losing one of their own to a farmwork-related death.

“That’s a very somber reminder that we should never become complacent in our efforts to make our farms safer places to live and work.”

As Hoosier farmers begin to harvest, program members remind farmers to keep safety a top priority. Agriculture safety guides, disaster preparedness resources and the Indiana Farm Fatality Summary can be found online.

Written by Ashvini Malshe.

## AWARDS

From page F1

Welker Equipment and Indiana Farm Bureau Insurance, as well as an all-expenses paid trip to compete at the 2023 American Farm Bureau convention in San Juan, Puerto Rico in January. The de Groot’s also will be awarded the David L. Leising Memorial Award

Winners and finalists will be formally recognized during the INFB state convention in December. Learn more about this year’s winners below.

### Carter and Abby Morgan, Vermillion County

Carter and Abby Morgan took different paths to find their love of agriculture. Carter’s started at a young age as the fourth generation on the family farm producing corn, soybeans and wheat. Abby got her start in agriculture by showing sheep as a first-generation member of 4-H. They both attended Purdue University earning degrees in agriculture.

In addition to farming with his family, Carter serves as a soil health consultant at the local Soil and Water Conservation District where he promotes conservation practices such as no-till, cover crops and conservation management.

“Conservation is very important to our farm,” said Carter. “Keeping our soil in place and keeping our soil healthy is critical to allowing the next generation to be involved in agriculture and on the farm.”

Abby works as the 4-H Extension educator for Purdue Extension in Montgomery County. She serves over 600 youth from kindergarten through 12th grade and manages nearly 100 adult volunteers.

In addition to their involvement in 4-H and their local church, the Morgans are active Farm Bureau members, with Carter having served as a member of the county’s board of directors since 2013. The Morgans also served on the Vermillion County Farm Bureau YF&AP Committee from

2013 to 2021.

“Carter and I applied for the Excellence in Ag award because we want to give back to the ag industry and inspire the next generation of leaders,” said Abby. “We wanted to have a platform to talk about issues impacting agriculture and help provide solutions to those issues.”

### Johan and Déjanne de Groot, Huntington County

The de Groot’s own a diversified farm operation, which includes a large dairy farm of approximately 2,600 cows, as well as acreage for alfalfa and corn production. Both are natives of Holland. Johan moved to the U.S. in 2002 with his family to start the dairy farm. He graduated from Michigan State University where he studied dairy production. Johan manages the employees and multiple aspects of the farm, including a robotics facility. He also oversees the breeding program, manages crop rotations, and makes planting decisions.

“I have always enjoyed farming, even since I was a little kid,” said Johan. “I enjoy working with living animals, putting seed in the ground, encouraging employees and always striving to do better.”

After completing internships in the U.S., Déjanne finished her studies in agricultural entrepreneurship in Holland and officially joined Johan to run the family operation in 2018. Déjanne is responsible for all the bookwork, payroll and overseeing the heifer operation.

One of the de Groot’s goals for the future is expanding the farm with an agritourism component.

“We want to have people come out to the farm,” said Déjanne. “They could visit with the cows, see how they get milked, learn what they eat, and maybe we’ll create a small market for milk, yogurt and ice cream.”

The de Groot’s are active Farm Bureau members. Both chair the Huntington County Farm Bureau YF&AP Committee, and Déjanne also serves on the board as secretary and treasurer.

# Purdue Student Farm collaborates with campus cultural centers

PROVIDED BY  
PURDUE UNIVERSITY

Located on the edge of Purdue’s campus, the Student Farm emphasizes the education of undergraduate students through sustainable methods. Student groups enrolled in the “Small Farms Experience” courses manage day-to-day farm operation, with volunteers from the Purdue Student Farm Organization, part-time undergraduate interns and full-time undergraduate summer interns.

Since 2018, the Student Farm manager, Chris Adair, has collaborated with the Latino Cultural Center (LCC) to provide vegetable plants for an on-campus garden next to the center.tomatillo-salsa-recipe-card.jpg

“The Latino Cultural Center’s garden was started by graduate students in the College of Agriculture to help remind LatinX students, faculty and staff the importance that agriculture plays in our cultural heritage,” says Carina Olaru, director of the LCC. “Since then, we have created Mercadito Martes or ‘farmers market Tuesdays’ and provide free produce to anyone in the community.”

Every Tuesday during the school year students will harvest crops from the cultural center’s garden and create recipe and nutrition cards to hand out on the corner of University and 5th Street. One of the most recent recipes provided was tomatillo salsa, using onions, cilantro, jalapenos and tomatillos from the garden.

Since the initial stages of collaboration with the Latino Cultural Center, Chris Adair, has also connected with both the Native American Educational and Cultural Center (NAECC) and the Asian American and Asian Resource and Cultural Center (AAARCC) to assist with on-campus gardens.

“This season the NAECC



Image provided by Purdue University

From left, Chris Adair, Carina Olaru, Felica Ahasteen-Bryant (Diné) and Pamela K. Sari stand near NAECC’s Three Sisters Garden.

was very intentional with their garden,” said Adair. The NAECC chose to plant seeds from tribal nation seed banks to create a Three Sisters Garden.

The crops corn, beans and squash are known as the Three Sisters, and for centuries these crops have been at the center of Native American agriculture and culinary legend and tradition.

“The Student Farm provided guidance and support to start our Three Sisters Garden,” said Felica Ahasteen-Bryant (Diné), director of the NAECC. “We specifically chose different varieties of seeds to honor our tribal nations, including Hopi corn and Cherokee beans. The tribal nation seeds provide a special connection to our ancestors and the garden gives us nourishment and a physical and spiritual connection with the land.”

The AAARCC has a pop-up pantry location, and the original goal of creating a garden was to provide fresh vegetables. This year, the AAARCC connected with students to plan a more intentional garden by requesting stories about how herbs and spices are meaningful to them.

“Since the start of the garden in 2021, it became clear that we should explore learn-

ing purpose gardens to help students, faculty, and staff reconnect with their personal and community history around food and garden, and to understand more systemic issues such as food insecurity,” says Pamela K. Sari, director of the AAARCC. “Chris has been very generous with sharing knowledge and introduced the importance of not only planning your garden, but also telling the stories behind our food.”

The AAARCC lacks the space for a garden plot, so Adair assisted with education about container gardening and an indoor hydroponics set up.

“The Student Farm starts many plants using the greenhouses located in the Horticulture Plant Growth Facility on campus, and students not only plant but help to manage and care the gardens as well,” said Adair. “Timing is such an important factor, and we hope to make incremental improvements over the years.”

Recent Sustainable Farming and Food Systems graduate, Alfonso Rosselli, has been working with the Student Farm for three years and looks forward to helping plan the cultural center gardens to grow specific culturally connected produce.

“Both Chris and I are looking towards the future

for these garden plots and hope to be more intentional with the seeds and crops we choose,” says Rosselli.

For more information visit: <https://www.purdue.edu/hla/sites/studentfarm/>

Written by Nyssa Lilovich.



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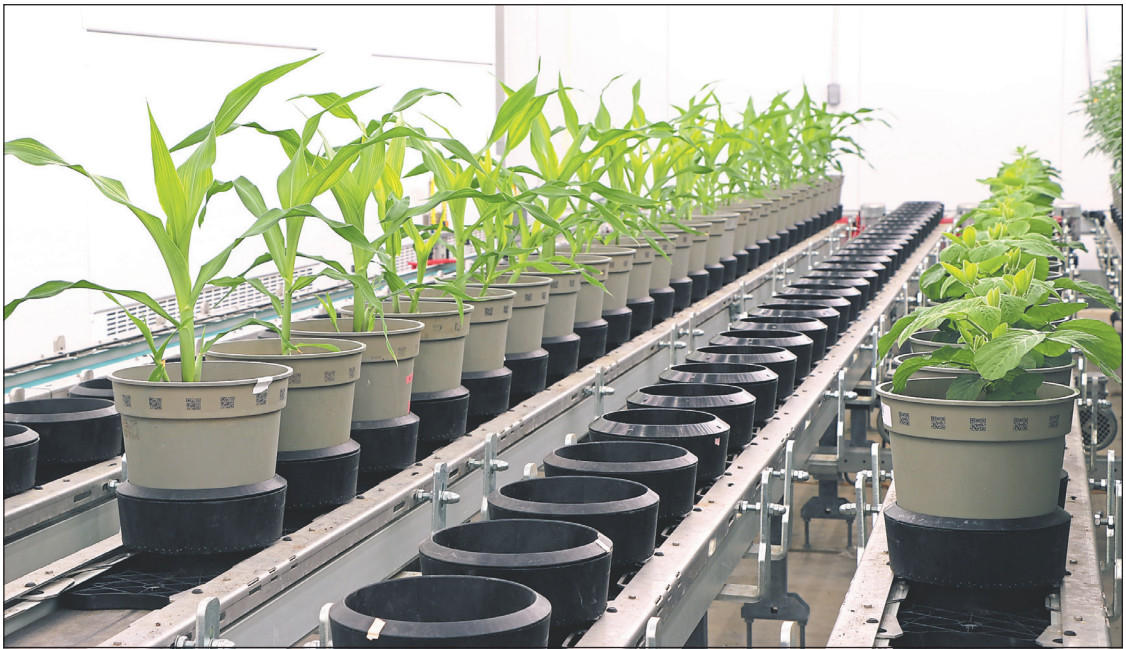
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Photos courtesy of the Ag Alumni Seed Phenotyping Facility / Purdue University

**LEFT:** 3D reconstruction of corn roots to provide image analysis output including total root volume, root length and depth distribution of roots. **ABOVE:** 3D reconstruction of corn roots to provide image analysis output including total root volume, root length and depth distribution of roots.

## From page F1

## X-ray vision reveals roots

Purdue is the only academic phenotyping facility in the nation to offer a fully automated,

## Walking plants

"Purdue's team created an integrated system drawing from the best technologies around the world" Yang said.

## Field testing

Yang also leads efforts within the Indiana Corn and Soybean Innovation Center (ICSC) at the Agronomy Center for Research and Education, or ACRE, a field testing facility near campus. The center, which also is part of Purdue's Next Moves in Plant Sciences, is the first field phenotyping facility of its kind in North America.

Through the center researchers have access to unmanned aerial



Tom Campbell / Purdue University

The Indiana Corn and Soybean Innovation Center (ICSC) at the Agronomy Center for Research and Education (ACRE).

vehicles, or drones, and a field rover equipped with sensors. In addition to cameras and hyperspectral sensors, the drones offer light detection and ranging units, or LiDAR sensors. LiDAR evaluates the range between the scanning system and objects using the time it takes for the signal to travel to objects and back to the sensor. It works like radar, but uses light from a laser as the signal.

For researchers who don't have expertise in remote sensing, a support team is available to provide data acquisition and processing.

Just outside the backdoors of the center is a gantry, a bridge-like structure that supports moveable sensors over a small plot of land to gather data on plants throughout the days.

The center also offers equip-

ment supporting plant analysis, including a high-speed seed sorter that records the length, width and color of each seed, as well as an ear photometry box that measures more than 30 physical traits of an ear of corn, and a root scanner. In addition, it offers stations and equipment for sample preparation including threshing, shelling, grinding and treating.

"These phenotyping facilities combine to create a multiscale research pipeline," Yang said. "They enable Purdue's scientists to take research from a highly controlled environment to a full-scale field – to make new connections and test models at different scales. We have and are continuing to build the infrastructure to pursue ground-breaking research."

*Written by Elizabeth Gardner.*

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# Purdue to boost climate-smart forestry practices among private landowners

PROVIDED BY  
PURDUE UNIVERSITY

WEST LAFAYETTE — Purdue University has received \$12 million of a \$35 million project led by the American Forest Foundation and funded by the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Partnership for Climate Smart Commodities to help family forest owners practice climate-smart forestry in Indiana and eight other states throughout the eastern half of the U.S.

The project’s other partners are The Nature Conservancy, the Center for Heirs Property Preservation, and Women Owning Woodlands. The project could sequester an estimated 4.9 million tons of atmospheric carbon – a greenhouse gas that affects climate – over a 20-30-year period.

“Our digital forestry group has been working on various tools and thinking about how to apply these tools to real-life problems,” said

Songlin Fei, who directs Purdue’s Integrated Digital Forestry Initiative. “This is an opportunity to apply our expertise to solving part of the climate-change puzzle.”

Purdue’s cross-disciplinary Integrated Digital Forestry Initiative includes faculty members from the colleges of Agriculture, Engineering, Science, Liberal Arts and Libraries and the Polytechnic Institute. The Integrated Digital Forestry Initiative, one of the five strategic investments in Purdue’s Next Moves, leverages digital technology and multidisciplinary expertise to measure, monitor and manage urban and rural forests to maximize social, economic and ecological benefits.

“We’re bringing a traditional field into the digital age,” said Fei, professor, forestry and natural resources, and Dean’s Chair of Remote Sensing.

Purdue will use advanced digital forestry technologies



Purdue Integrated Digital Forestry Initiative  
High resolution aerial photo captured by a drone shows individual trees at Martell Forest in West Lafayette, Indiana.

to do the measurement, monitoring, reporting and verification of carbon sequestrations that the project requires. The automated technology, applied at a regional scale with unprecedented accuracy, will be based on data collected by satellites and drones with various sensors, such as light detection and ranging (LiDAR). The team will also develop a simulation system that will utilize artificial intelligence to generate optimized forest

management scenarios. The work will result in a web-based tool that landowners can use to estimate and predict the climate-smart commodity market potential of their properties. The team is also building a smartphone-based app for tree measurement and monitoring.

American families own

nearly 40 percent of the nation’s forests, yet few of them take part in forest carbon projects or work from a management plan. However, with proper management, trees can grow faster and sequester more carbon, Fei said.

Landowners will receive economic incentives for participating in the program. Payment to landowners will depend on which climate-smart carbon practices they use. Project staff or consulting foresters will also provide landowners technical advice and guidance in establishing a forest management plan.

The project partners aim to enroll 1,600 landowners, who control a total of over 160,000 acres –about 250 square miles – of family forests, into the Family Forest Carbon Program (FFCP), which was developed by the American Forest Foundation

and The Nature Conservancy. The foundation and the conservancy will make special efforts to recruit rural, minority and women forest landowners in collaboration with the Center for Heirs Property Preservation and Women Owning Woodlands.

The FFCP already operates in a dozen states in the upper Midwest and the Northeast. The USDA grant will bring nine more states into the FFCP: Indiana, Ohio, Kentucky, Tennessee, Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia and Alabama. In several states, such as Indiana, hardwood-related commodities contribute significantly to the economy.

“This grant allows us to combat climate change, put technology into the hands of forest landowners, and engage underserved and rural Americans,” Fei said.

Written by Steve Koppes.

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